



Breaking Gender Stereotypes and Cultural Taboos: Ghanaian Women Art Educators Confront Gender Bias in Art Education

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Abstract

Ghanaian women art educators grapple with systemic sexism and gender stereotypes prescribed to Ghanaian women and girls that result in inequality in the field of art education. Cultural taboos toward womanhood hinder many Ghanaian women and girls progress in enrolling in particular art courses and in pursuing art as a career. This narrative inquiry critically examines six Ghanaian women art educators' experiences teaching art and the expectation for female students to become wives and mothers. Through a Ghanaian feminist framework, I explore how women art educators attempt to provide the opportunity for girls to enter the field of art and challenge traditional African norms of womanhood. This investigation demonstrates how Ghanaian women art educators' service, as activists, seek ways to empowerment female students even within a Eurocentric male dominated education ideology.

Keywords: Ghana, Ghanaian art education, Ghanaian women, Ghanaian feminism, Kente weaving, womanhood, activism, narrative inquiry

Challenging Patriarchal Norms and Taboos

Gender inequality in Ghana's education system stems from the perception that educating girls is a waste of resources, as they are expected to marry, adopt a housewife mentality, and remain at home to raise children (Amanor-Wilks, 2023; Ampofo & Atobrah, 2023; Forsgren et al., 2019) (see Figure 1). Moreover, gender discrimination embedded in the colonial educational system has led to higher dropout rates among girls, and exclusion from cultural heritage, economic independence, and education—further marginalizing their creative potential.



Figure 1. I visited women from Yendi in the Northern Region of Ghana (March, 2018). Courtesy of the author.

Despite Ghanaian women's contribution in preserving cultural heritage, gender stereotypes continue to fuel discrimination (Oguamanam & Yeboah-Appiah, 2024; Yeboah-Appiah, 2021). In this narrative inquiry, I examine how traditional roles imposed on many Ghanaian women and girls reinforced inequality in art education.¹ Systemic sexism and misogynistic dogma limit their access to certain art materials and art courses. For instance, Kente weaving remains male-dominated due to taboos linking the practice to sexual power (Ross & Adu-Agyem, 2008). These fear-based myths transcend for generations, leaving some women unsure of their place in society, especially those drawn to art.

This article center six Ghanaian women art educators-activist,² who work to empower women and girls in the arts by challenging cultural taboos, stereotypes, and patriarchal norms. I examine how male-dominated art forms deter girls from pursuing art, pressuring them into traditional roles of womanhood. Using Ghanaian feminism as a culturally specific lens, I explore women's agency and advocacy in the arts as part of broader global feminist movements. I share the educators' experiences confronting gender barriers in their teaching and its impact on female students. Finally, I reflect on my return to Ghana six years later to assess changes in support for women and girls in art education.

Bridging Diasporic Voices

My interest in Ghanaian women art educators grew from researching the underrepresentation of African American women in art education. As an African American art educator, I noticed the art field often overlooked social, historical, racial, and gender issues shaping K-12 curricula (Bailey, 2020). I connected with other African American K-12 art educators to understand if their experiences

¹ A January 9, 2018, letter from The Office for Research Protections at Penn State, stated the "research met the criteria for exempt research according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations" for my study titled: "The Visibility of Ghanaian Women in Art Education and their Teaching and Artistic Practice." (STUDY00008801). The study was funded by the Africana Research Center and the School of Visual Arts at Penn State.

² I invited nine Ghanaian women art educators to participate in the study and interviewed seven; one later withdrew. In total, six completed interviews. These women represent the Ashanti, Northern, and Greater Accra regions in Ghana. I recruited participants through WhatsApp using mutual contacts. To protect their privacy, I used pseudonyms. Before the trip, I scheduled meeting times and locations. I conducted each interview using my cell phone to record, and later transcribed the conversations. This approach supported clear communication and allowed participants to engage at their convenience.

mirrored mine and how race and gender shaped their teaching and support. Using a Black feminist framework, I analyzed how race and gender oppressions limited these educators' ability to fully integrate within predominantly White educational institutions (see also, Acuff, 2018; Collins, 2000; Lorde, 1984). Their stories revealed critical insights and sparked my curiosity about African women art educators and how their cultural and social contexts inform their teaching and advocacy.

My understanding of feminism began with a Western lens. As a graduate student, I attended the African Feminist Initiative (AFI) conference sponsored by the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department at The Pennsylvania State University. There I met African feminists Amina Mama, Yvette Abrahams, Juliet Kushaba, Wunpini Mohammed, Nancy Henuku, and many others. Listening to their experiences and advocacy helped me understand the difference between Black feminism and African feminism. Their work, grounded in African history, culture, and traditions, inspired me to explore Ghanaian feminism in art education and examine how gender and culture intersect in that context.

In March 2018, I traveled to Ghana for 10 days³ as a graduate student alongside Professor Emeritus Dr. Grace Hampton's program, *Destination Ghana 4- Research Seminar on the Global Perspective on the Role of the Arts and Culture in the Education Process*. During this trip, I visited Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and the University for Development Studies (UDS) Collaborative Research Consortium (PKUCRC). I designed this project to explore how Ghanaian women perceive art education, focusing on cultural teaching traditions, curriculum stereotypes, British teaching influences, and women's representation in the art field.

I returned to Ghana in summer 2024,⁴ six years after my initial visit and reconnecting with three of the six art educators I first interviewed in 2018. Over

³ The 10-day trip included presented at a graduate student seminar and visiting cultural places. Several limitations created obstacles beyond my control and the participants' control. First, the short timeframe and tight itinerary prevented me from visiting the teachers' classrooms or schools. Second, transportation issues caused an interview to be canceled, and inadequate cell phone connections led to the loss of another interview.

⁴ I participated in a five-day faculty development trip, sponsored by Claflin University's Global Initiative Program at KNUST in Kumasi, Ghana. During the visit, I explored cultural sites in Kumasi and the surrounding areas for four days and spent one day in Accra.

that time, I deepened my understanding of Ghanaian feminism to better grasp the cultural taboos shaping women's positions in art education. I critically reflect on my interviews and observations from both visits.

A Black Feminist's Perspective on Ghanaian Art Education

As a Black feminist, I have long understood racial and gendered challenges African American women art educators face (Bailey, 2023). But my knowledge of African feminisms was limited until I visited Ghana. While African Americans and Ghanaian women share struggles against racism and sexism, their experiences differ due to distinct histories and cultures. As an art educator in a White-dominated, Eurocentric system that often silences women of color, I now see the importance of embracing a Black feminist perspective rooted in African contexts.

Employing a Black feminist framework helped me grasp the complexities of African feminism and its connections to art education. Rejecting a one-size-fits-all approach, I focus on a Ghanaian feminist perspective, recognizing feminist experiences vary across the African continent. African feminism is not new and should not be defined by Western ideals. As Nanjala Nyabola, (2024) explains, "The concept of African feminism contains within it an imperative to work towards the liberation of African women from the various oppressions that intersect through their lives, not simply to make reference to African women" (p. 95). This realization compels me to embrace African feminisms as an alternative lens for interpreting history. Through interviews⁵ with Ghanaian women art educators, I explore sexism and colonialism embedded in Ghana's art education.

Art Education in Ghana

Art education in Ghana has faced numerous challenges throughout its history. Although art was reintroduced into the Ghanaian educational system in 1919, art education was met with resistance from Christian missionaries who dismissed art as primitive and unnecessary (Ismaila & Eshun, 2018). Scholars

⁵ Finding suitable locations for interviews proved difficult; most took place either in a room on campus or at my hotel. Despite this challenge, I made reasonable efforts to accommodate scheduling, particularly since most women were either coming to me or teaching classes at the time. This approach facilitated effective communication and allowed participants to engage in the study at their convenience.

highlight the legacy of British colonialism on Ghana's art curriculum, which shaped a system uninterested in artistic practices that reflect African culture (Addo & Adu, 2022; Nortey et al., 2021). Ghanaian art teaching practices, therefore, tend to mirror the priorities and perspectives of the colonizers, perpetuating a skewed understanding of education that fails to resonate with the cultural contexts of many Ghanaian communities.

Education in Ghana is widely valued for building economic growth for the country (Opoku-Asare & Siaw, 2015). However, many Ghanaians doubt art education serves the same purpose (Kpodo et., 2024; Opoku-Bonsu et al., 2017). Some see art education as a foundation for advanced training and apprenticeship (Opoku-Asare & Siaw, 2015), while others emphasize the importance of fostering emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development (Dadzie et al., 2020). Still, many in Ghana's communities and education sector remain unconvinced of the potential of art careers (Kpodo et., 2024; Swanzy-Impraim et al., 2023).

Art education in Ghana is perceived as a subject for low-performing students who are considered less intelligent and not able to achieve in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields (Evans-Solomon & Opoku-Asare, 2011; Kpodo et al., 2024; Opoku-Asare & Siaw, 2015; Opoku-Bonsu et al., 2017). Viewing *visual art* as a field for those lacking critical and analytical thinking creates major barriers to earning respect as art educators. These assumptions undermine efforts to promote visual art programs and discourage students, especially girls, who aspire to become artists.

Ghanaian Art Education for Girls

Researchers Francesca Evans-Solomon and Nana Afia Opoku-Asare (2011) are among the few scholars who examine girls' art education in Ghana. Their study of 300 girls from Ghana's Central Region schools reveals how cultural stereotypes and school administrators impact girls' choices in the visual arts. Many girls are steered toward "girl-friendly" and "female-appropriate" art careers, reinforcing gender norms (Evans-Solomon & Opoku-Asare, 2011, p. 118).

Administrators often guide girls into visual arts programs based on outdated beliefs about what is suitable for women, linking artistic choices to domestic roles and limiting their creative and professional options (Evans-Solomon

& Opoku-Asare, 2011; Ross & Adu-Agyem, 2008). For example,

Sculpture involves lifting and carving heavy materials and is therefore considered inappropriate for girls. It demands exerting much energy; it is tedious, time-consuming and involves working with heavy and sharp tools, which girls are afraid of. Girls do not have the level of energy Sculpture demands and is deemed appropriate for boys because they are strong. (Evans-Solomon & Opoku-Asare, 2011, p. 125)

The research revealed further that 136 girls selected textiles over sculpture as an elective course, a preference which stems from gendered social taboos against drawing any part of the human body and the perceived messiness of ceramics. Textile arts, historically associated with women's involvement in screen printing, batik, and tie-dyeing, are often viewed as more suitable for girls. Contrary to stereotypical associations of textiles with women, traditional Kente cloth weaving remains exclusive to men because of misogynistic beliefs and cultural taboos.

Kente Cloth Weaving

Traditional Kente cloth weaving remains male-dominated, with few women participating, as patriarchal norms in Ghana label it too labor-intensive and competitive for women (Amanor-Wilks, 2023; Oguamanam & Yeboah-Appiah, 2024; Ross & Adu-Agyem, 2008; Yeboah-Appiah, 2021) (see Figure 2). Lawyers Chidi Oguamanam and Angela Yeboah-Appiah (2024) further explain how these norms discourage women from entering the art field.

If women were permitted to weave, then they could also earn a similar prestige through personal achievement and therefore would, rightly or wrongly, be perceived to be in direct competition with men. Conceivably, they had to bring in this taboo to scare women away from weaving (pp. 270-271).

Allowing women to weave would challenge male dominance, enabling them to gain prestige and recognition equal to men.



Figure 2. I visited the Bonwire Kente Weaving Center in Bonwire, Ghana (March, 2018). Courtesy of the author.

Another study by Economic Specialist Amanor-Wilks (2023) in Bonwire, Ghana, identified five main reasons why women do not participate in weaving: (a) women are expected to cook for their husbands, (b) domestic duties are time-consuming, (c) sitting at the loom would cause infertility, (d) girls are deliberately not taught to weave, and (e) weaving is perceived to be tedious and labor-intensive. The most significant barrier is the “traditional loom taboo,” rooted in the belief that menstruating women weaken men’s power (Amanor-Wilks, 2023, p. 171). These taboos are deliberately constructed to protect male privilege by blocking women’s economic and creative freedom. Addressing this exclusion requires Ghanaian feminist frameworks to understand how women resist sexism in art and education.

Ghanaian Feminism Framework

The term “feminism” has historically been criticized for its lack of inclusivity and its predominant focus on the concerns of middle-class U.S and European White⁶ women (Collins, 2000). Researcher Ivy Fofie (2023) explains that the need for African feminism developed to expose gap between White feminism and Black feminism in describing the lived experiences from different African cultures. This criticism has led to recognizing the need for more diverse and intersectional perspectives within feminist discourse.

In Ghana, women led feminist conversations during both the pre-colonial and colonial periods. The Ghanaian feminist movement of the 1960s serves as a notable example, although the struggles and activism of that era remain under documented (Fofie, 2023; Mohammed, 2022; Neely, 2017). Ghanaian feminism identifies the distinct histories and intersectional experiences that shape the lives of many women in Ghana. These experiences reflect the influence of gender, race, sexuality, economics, and power dynamics. Ghanaian feminists actively confront patriarchal norms and cultural taboos that restrict women to domestic roles. They reject the idea that women lack the intellectual and cultural capacity to make decisions or earn an income, exposing how such beliefs deny women economic agency and leadership opportunities (Bieteru, 2023; Clark & Mohammand, 2023).

Ghanaian Feminist Artists

Ghanaian feminist artists organize public spaces that amplify women’s visibility. For example, cofounder of ACCRA [dot] ALT, Sionne Rameah Neely (2017), highlights that one of the missions of this independent arts network is to provide spaces for African artists, particularly women, to connect and collaborate with artists throughout the diaspora, thereby increasing their visibility. “Progressively over the last decade, feminist creative organizing in Accra has taken shape through collectives and projects working to amplify visibility and provide affirming space for women and women’s stories in the public sphere” (p. 149). Ghanaian feminist artists challenge traditional conservatism in art and lead efforts to dismantle stereotypes and taboos surrounding women through mentorship and

training, fostering a new generation of empowered creators.

Using a Ghanaian feminist framework, this research highlights the challenges and opportunities women and girls faced in art education. This perspective offers a vital platform for Ghanaian women art educators, presenting a global lens to examine the complexities of feminist art education research. The lived experiences of Ghanaian women art educators are often overlooked, with limited scholarly documentation or dissemination of their insights, and they continue to face unequal access to art education resources and opportunities, which often favor men. For example, a study of high school seniors in Ghana’s Ashanti Region (Ismaila & Eshun, 2018) surveyed 155 girls and 230 boys but failed to address gender disparities in attitudes or career aspirations in visual art.

Narrative Inquiry with Ghanaian Women Art Educators

To enrich knowledge and scholarship about Ghanaian women art educators, I have explored the intersection of Ghanaian feminism and art education. Using narrative inquiry methods, I engaged with Ghanaian women art educators to explore their perspectives on gender biases, stereotypes, and cultural responsibilities, drawing on stories as data to reveal how they experience and challenge the myths and taboos that shape society, and insights that can inform and transform curriculum and pedagogy (Clandinin, 2023; Kim, 2016). By documenting the stories of Ghanaian women art educators, I highlight diverse teaching perspectives often excluded from global discourse. I asked participants critical questions⁷ about their journeys, curriculum development, Ghana’s education system, and representation of Ghanaian women artists to guide the research.

⁷ I emailed each participant a set of questions before the trip. The questions are the following:

1. In your own lived experiences as a Ghanaian woman art educator how do you insert Ghanaian cultural heritage and indigenous traditions into the curriculum?
2. Within the Ghanaian educational system, what is the perception of art in education in Ghana, especially for girls and women?
3. Within art education, how are the effects of stereotypes and misconceptions associated with Ghanaian women filtered into the curriculum, to what extent; and how do you believe this hindered their representation in the field of art education?
4. With art education teaching resource primarily Western Eurocentric based, how do you insert Ghanaian women artists into your curriculum?
5. How are Ghanaian women artists represented in art education?
6. Are there any art education organization or associations in Ghana, and are you a member?

⁶ White is capitalized to emphasize how Whiteness operates within institutions and communities, rather than to denote an individual’s racial identity. Ewing (2020) highlights that Whiteness remains invisible when it is only addresses race and by capitalizing White, White people do not have to address or question the power structure of race as a problem.

At times, I found it challenging to set aside my perspective as an American. However, I made a concerted effort to listen carefully to each participant's story to avoid assumptions and preconceptions about their experiences teaching art in Ghana. While this study does not capture the full spectrum of experiences and perspectives of all Ghanaian women art educators, their narratives “set the tone for the evolution of conversations around feminism in Ghana and the normalization of feminist discourses” within art education (Mohammed, 2022, p. 1).

Resisting Ghana's Gender Stereotypes

Ghanaian women art teachers are keenly aware that historical traditions and cultural taboos block them from teaching certain art forms to girls. The interviewees describe their frustration battling misogynistic attitudes that undermine teaching art to girls, and how the effects of cultural stereotypes have perpetuated misconceptions of womanhood as a linear trajectory to motherhood (see Figure 3). For example, in responding to my question: *How are the effects of stereotypes and misconceptions associated with Ghanaian women filtered into the curriculum?* They claim that even some mothers employ scare tactics to discourage their daughters from pursuing art, warning them of the potential societal backlash. Amy,⁸ who taught high school for five years emphasized how girls are trained to become traditional mothers and wives from their community.

Women are normally portrayed as mothers. Like from the artworks that [have] always been around, like mother and child loving and that's how Ghanaian women [have] been stereotyped, always homey, never taking the leadership role.

These depictions suggest that women belong in the home and are not seen as leaders or active participants in public or professional life.



Figure 3. On the way to visit chief of from the Dagbon Kindom in Northern Region Ghana, I visited the Women in the village. (March, 2018). Courtesy of the author.

These tactics have worked as Rachel, who taught for 19 years in higher education, shared the challenges she faced when trying to persuade girls to explore Kente cloth weaving.

When it comes to weaving, for several reasons, I think that's the culture, that women are not supposed to weave in the olden days. Most people don't want to do it—most women are not advised to go into the weaving. All they do is pick the cotton and prepare the yarn for the weavers to weave. They feel particular jobs are for men only and not for women, and then [they are saying] that if you are a weaver woman and you go and start weaving you end up being barren and not giving birth.

⁸ To protect the privacy of the participants, I used pseudonyms throughout the study.

Even at the elementary level, where Ashley teaches, she shared the similar experiences when talking to young girls about Kente weaving and other male-dominated art forms. Girls are taught from an early age these damaging myths.

You know, there were some art forms that ladies were not supposed to do. For instance, when you teach Bonwire Kente, it was taboo for a woman to weave because it was for the men. There are some other forms, like blacksmithing, it's not for the woman, it's for the men.

Ashley explains how Ghanaian men often use fear and manipulation to discourage girls from taking specific art courses, insisting they need to focus on becoming good mothers.

You know, I think the whole idea takes time as I tell early on in Ghana, the woman, your place is at the kitchen. So how can you spend this whole time sitting down weaving and taking care of the kids and all that. So, they say something to scare you. One of them believes, if you are a woman, you can't give birth. So, because of that, they scared some women away, and with blacksmithing, it is very tedious work with the hammer, and they believe the women do not have the strength to do it.

Mandy who taught high school for 14 years, notice how male instructors and administrators often discourage girls from learning sculpting, painting, and metalwork, claiming their bodies are too delicate for such work.

At times, men feel that every credit should go to them... When it comes to areas like sculpture and painting and some few metals, women are not well seen there. ... They feel that some [of] the areas are for men, like sculpture. You need to be strong to do it-woodwork and all those things. Then areas of weaving, dying, and beadmaking are flexible for women. Sometimes when the women want to do the sculpture, they discourage them.

Both Ashley and Mandy express how strength and skill are gendered. As a result, many talented girls are directed into traditionally feminine crafts like beadwork, fabric design, and basketry.

Donna, a university educator, explains that the lack of women's studies programs and an unsupportive curriculum makes it hard to guide students researching Ghanaian women artists. This gap also reinforces harmful myths, such as the belief that using certain art materials can cause harm.

There are no direct women's studies when it comes to that. ... But the normal curriculum that teaches about female artists in particular, you hardly see anything like that you know. ... Women and art haven't been seen for a long time and even in the histories and how you hardly see the Ghanaian women.

Female students lack space for critical dialogue to explore women's contributions in art, while societal barriers, taboos, and gendered norms continue to limit their participation. Ghanaian women art educators reveal how systemic discouragement still shape girls' experience and until communities, educators, and institutions confront these biases, many girls will remain blocked from pursuing creative careers.

Societal pressures often push girls toward the sciences or label them unintelligent, making art seem like an acceptable alternative. Participants noted a bias favoring boys, revealing gender disparities in art education (Amanor-Wilks, 2023) (see Figure 4). To explore this perception, I asked *Within the Ghanaian educational system, what is the perception of art in education in Ghana, especially for girls and women?*



Figure 4. While traveling on the bus, I took a picture of the billboard from the Ghanaians Against Child Abuse GACA campaign that read, “I am happy when I am given the same opportunities as boys.” (June 2024). Courtesy of the author.

Mary, who has taught for nine years at a university, describes how the women in the community perceived education as a waste of time.

Women are expected to get married, have kids. I think it goes almost everywhere. I use myself as an example. When I was going through school, [and] I came home, they wouldn't tell me [directly, instead] they would ask my mother when is she going to get married and have kids, schooling [is] too much ... too much education. By the way, you are going to end up in the kitchen anyway.

Even though many people do not respect art like other subjects, Ashley emphasizes the need to expose girls to women artists.

Sometimes they think art is for the weak and dull students. So, I do encourage them, and I produce some artwork and sometimes I show each of them. They are happy about the work; they want to learn it.

Mandy explains how other educators or administrators discourage girls from taking art courses or treat them as mere schedule fillers.

When it comes to art, unfortunately art is banned for less intelligent students. So, especially with the girls, they think they should do art. Sometimes they are pushed to do art even when they don't have the interest. So, in our case we get a few girls who love to do art, and teachers laugh at them just because they are offering art. That is [the] way they offer that course. So, we have a challenge with our girls doing art, because I have a few of them especially where I teach.

Donna observed that many professors assume the arts is not scholarly if you are not in STEM.

Ghanaian people, they think that art it's not scholarly and so it's not for people who think. To do very well in school they must be doing science. They must be doing something else rather than art and for some time that has been a struggle for some of us to try to explain to people that you need to be good. ... I think the problem has been ... everything has been reduced [to] vocation. ... When it comes to sewing, for instance, because they're not doing well in school, you can go and sew.

Amy offered a critical reflection on how gender inequality in education continues to shape opportunities for girls, especially in the arts.

I always come back to a focus on the male child and given all the attention and educating the male child. Though I know, there [have] been some programs that have tried to work on getting more women in the mainstream so that women can also be educated at a higher level, but I think it's on the slower pace and it's affected my school among the art teachers. I'm the only female art teacher in the school.

Rachel shared how deeply ingrained misconceptions about art education and the career choices. Unfortunately, art education is equated to failure or lack of ambition.

What are you going to do? Are you going to sit outside and draw? They don't know that we have different aspects of the arts. ... They don't know what we do. They also think what will you do after the program. ... People look at arts courses and they feel that it's not good for women. ... My own cousin's daughter and the mother told me those courses are for dropouts, and my daughter is not a dropout.

The participants reveal deep-rooted gender biases that shape how art education is perceived for girls in Ghana.

Societal pressure pushes girls toward “respectable” roles or “intelligent” fields like science, while art is often dismissed. Teachers like Mary, Ashley, Mandy, Donna, Amy, and Rachel challenge these views by encouraging girls, sharing their stories, and pushing back against stigma. Their advocacy and mentorship confront harmful norms and reflect a growing hope that change is both possible and already in motion.

Activism of Ghanaian Women Art Educators Woven Together

I returned to Ghana in the summer of 2024 to reconnect with the women I originally interviewed⁹ and assess any progress toward gender equality in art education, as well as shifts in cultural taboos affecting women and girls. I visited Mandy, who was teaching at an all-girls high school, and asked her if more girls have taken an interest in art since my 2018 visit. Mandy explained that there have been some changes, but not significant ones.

It is one of the challenges we face as art teachers. But at least they get encouraged when they see at least that we are artists, and we are getting something at the end of the month—some salary. So, they get encouraged. But even among their peers, when you say you are an art student, they look down upon them. Funny enough they come back wanting to learn the arts.

9. The visit to Ghana took place primarily in Kumasi at KNUST over a five-day period. However, much of the art department was closed as students were preparing for exams. I took the opportunity to visit several cultural sites in the surrounding area. During the trip, I was only able to revisit one of the women, Mandy. Although I saw Donna and Mary, their schedules did not allow time for a follow-up discussion about the previous visit. I was unable to reach Rachel, and Amy had moved out of the area. I had scheduled a meeting with Ashley, but she canceled due to a family illness.

Mandy gives an example of a science student who wanted to learn basketry. When she asked the student why they did not take the classes, the student explained she was told to do science despite her interest in basketry. Mandy stressed, “We are trying our best to let our girls know that [it is worthwhile] to get a skill. ... We are trying our best, and the few numbers we get, we make sure we work with them.”

I returned to KNUST¹⁰ in Kumasi and was encouraged to see young women actively engaged in art. One student in the metal shop was tracing her image onto a brass plate. A ceramics student, Matilda, proudly shared a piece exploring themes of womanhood (see Figure 5). I witnessed the slow process of dismantling systemic sexism and challenging the deep gender stereotypes that block progress for Ghanaian women and girls in art. There is still a long way to go, however Ghanaian women art educators continue to push forward. Mandy explained that when girls see women art teachers earning money from their work, they begin to see art as a valuable skill that can also bring financial freedom.



Figure 5. In my second visit to KNUST in Kumasi in June 2024, I met Matilda, a ceramic student, in the Ceramic Studio. Courtesy of the author.

10. The week I visited KNUST, the art department was closed due to students preparing for their exams. There were few classes with students, primarily freshman working on current projects.

This study weaves together the narratives of six Ghanaian women art educators who act as activists, using visual art to empower girls and women. While honoring cultural traditions, they resist gender taboos and challenge perceptions that label weaving and sculpture as male domains. They expose how curriculum policies and misogynistic beliefs, such as claims that art is for the unintelligent or causes infertility, create systemic barriers for women pursuing nontraditional art forms (Evans-Solomon & Opoku-Asare, 2011).

The absence of female artists in the standard curriculum reveals the gap of women's contributions in art education have been overlooked or excluded. The absence of Ghanaian women artists in the art curriculum, not only limits students' exposure to diverse female role models but, also, reinforces the idea that art is a male-dominated field. A revised curriculum is needed to include and value women's artistic contributions for a more inclusive and representative art education in Ghana.

Ghanaian feminist perspectives highlight how women art educators navigate male-dominated fields, cultural stereotypes, and taboos. Their experiences reveal intersecting oppressions distinct from those of African American women. By examining these challenges through African feminism, this study shows the resilience of Ghanaian women and their efforts to shift cultural norms.

Understanding Ghanaian women art educators' stories is key to fostering equity and empowering women in art education. I hope to return and speak with more female students to deepen this global perspective on feminism and creative barriers. Exploring feminism and cultural barriers in art education through perspectives beyond the U.S. is essential to understanding the global challenges women face in creative fields.

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